"Dutchified" German*

By Albert F. Buffington
The Pennsylvania State College

The term "Dutchified" has been used for more than a century by Pennsylvania Germans and others to describe habits and characteristics peculiar to the Pennsylvania Germans. (1)

The appellation is particularly applied to the peculiar brand of English spoken by the average Pennsylvania German. "He talks Dutchified" is the layman's way of saying that a certain individual's English speech is colored by the phonological and syntactical features peculiar to the Pennsylvania German dialect. (2)

The same term might likewise be used to describe the type of German I have heard sung in my home community (i.e. the northern part of Dauphin County, the southern half of Northumberland County, and the southwest of Schuylkill County) by the majority of those attending mid-week prayer meetings, revival meetings, and other religious gatherings.

My observations are based largely upon the situation existing between 1910 and 1940. Up until 1930, English and so-called "High German" hymns were sung in approximately equal proportion at the prayer meetings and revival meetings sponsored by the Evangelical and United Brethren denominations in my community. Since 1930, attendance at mid-week prayer meetings has gradually dwindled to such a degree that most of these denominations have had to give up the prayer meeting. And the proportion of so-called "High German" hymns sung at revival meetings has greatly diminished.

Most of the people who attended these meetings and who joined in the singing of so-called "High German" hymns had not studied Standard German in school; they knew it only from having heard their grandmothers and grandfathers, or, in some instances, their mothers and fathers, read **Die heilige Schrift** and pray and sing in "Pennsylvania High German."

In order to check on my memory, I recently asked seven former participants to sing for me three of the hymns we sang most frequently. Although my informants were of different age groups (three were between 65 and 80, two between 50 and 65, and two between 40 and 50) no variations in phonology or morphology could be noted.

Here are the hymns as I heard them: (3)

I.

1. O wie selich waerdes sei,
   Bei den scheenen Engellei,
   Chorus:
   So selich, selich,
   Wann der Haer mich holet heim.
2. Meinche Mieder freien sich,
   Yesu wannich denk an dich;
   Chorus:
3. Denke doch an yenen Daag,
   Da man ewich leben maach,
   Chorus:
4. Yesus Grischdus hot's vollbracht,
   Was en Sinder selich macht,
   Chorus:
5. Mit den Gleider aantschtaan,
   Die mer net zereissen kann,
   Chorus:

II.

1. Macht eire Lamben faerdich, (3 times)
   Un fillet sie mit Eel.
   Chorus:
   O wie lieblich, wie lieblich, wie lieblich,
   Iss Yesus, er iss:
   Mein Aerleeser, mein Haer un mein Freind.
2. Un sei des Heils gewaerdich, (3 times)
   Bereidet Leib un Seel.
   Chorus:
3. Der Obend iss yekommen, (3 times)
   Die finschdre Nacht bricht ei.
   Chorus:
4. O Brieder sei dir haerrlich, (3 times)
   'Siss Yesus in der Seel.
   Chorus:
5. O Schweschder sei dir haerrlich, (3 times)
   'Siss Yesus in der Seel.
   Chorus:
6. Ya, Gott sei Dank, 'siss haerrlich, (3 times)
   'Siss Yesus in der Seel.
   Chorus:
7. Ach, waerich doch schun droben! (3 times)
   Mein Heiland, waerich dart.
   Chorus:
8. Wo dich die Schaaren loben,
   Und singt halleluya!
   Chorus:

III.

1. Selich kannsisei im Leben,
   Selich in denn Todenschtunt.
   Seliches Lob waerdsi erheben,
   Selich in denn Todenschtunt.
   Chorus:
   Heiland fiehr mich,
   Immer fiehr mich,
   Fiehre mich bei deinre Hand;
   Aufwerts, aufwerts bis mir kommen
   Ins verheissne Land.
2. Niemand hot's noch ausgegrinden,
   Aber noch so hoch gelehrt;
   Was die Seel im Jesus findet,
   Die da Welt denn Ricken kehrt.
   Chorus:

It will be noted by those familiar with Pennsylvania German and Standard High German that certain parts of these hymns are neither Pennsylvania German nor High German. Lack of knowledge of High German on the part of those singing these hymns has resulted in such false word-separations and word distortions as: [waerdes] for **wird es**, [Meinche Mieder freien sich] for **Mein Gemueth erfreuet sich**, [aantschtan] for **angetan**), [kannsisei] for **kann sich's sein**, [waerdsi] for **wird sie**, [ausgegrinden] for **ausgegruendet**.

Not one of my seven informants could tell me the meaning of the following lines:

1. [Meinche Mieder freien sich]
2. [Un sei des Heils gewaerdich]
3. [Selich kannsisei im Leben]
4. [Niemand hot's noch ausgegrinden]
5. [Aber noch so hoch gelehrt]

"Ja, ich wees net, was sel meent," was the reply I received from each one. Even my 80-year-old informant said, "So hot mei Daadi sie g'sunge, awwer ich wees net was as meent." (That's the way my father sang them, but I don't know what it means.)

It is not likely that the above hymns have ever appeared in print in the particular versions which we have noted above. Indeed, it would have been useless and difficult to have these hymns printed: useless because most of the people who sang them could not read German; and difficult, because the hymns were no longer High German hymns, but "Dutchified" German hymns having the phonological features peculiar to the Pennsylvania German dialect.

These hymns seem to have been transmitted verbally by several generations of **Vorsinger**. The latter was the man who led the singing and who very often sang the verses of the hymns alone, not infrequently introducing innovations into them or borrowing lines freely from other hymns. Indeed, a few of the High German versions of some of the stanzas of the three hymns under discussion occur as parts of other High German hymns in **Die Geistliche Viole**, published by Heinrich Fischer at New Berlin, Pennsylvania, in 1850. (4)

At this early date, when the first **Vorsinger** lifted the stanzas for his hymns from other hymns, he probably did not sing them in Standard High German, but in "Pennsylvania High German," which, as Dr. Ralph C. Wood has pointed out in the **Pennsylvania Germans** (Princeton, 1942) and particularly in a study published in the most recent issue of the **Germanic Review**, differed phonetically only slightly from the dialect used in everyday discourse. (5)

Whatever may have been the succeeding development, the hymns as I sang them and heard them sung between 1910 and 1930 reveal the definite influence of the dialect phonemic system upon them, e.g.

1. Under the influence of the following r the high vowels and the mid-vowels have a) either been lowered to short [a], so that we hear [wad][6] for **wird**, [ha][6] for **Herr**, [fadich][6] for **fertig**, [halich][6] for **herrlich**, [dad][6] for **dort** or b) are pronounced with the low front vowel and the r vocalized to a mid-low mixed vowel, as in **Aerleeser gewaerdich, aufwerts, gelehrt, kehrt.**
2. The [r]-sound has disappeared completely after the short [a] when final or when followed by a dental, e.g. [ha] for **Herr**, [wad] for **wird**, [fadich] for **fertig**, [dad] for **dort.**
3. The unlauted vowels are unrounded, so that we hear **scheenen, Sinder, fillet, Eel** and **Ricken** all pronounced without rounding.
4. The diphthong **eu** is replaced by [ai] written **ei** in the traditional popular orthography), e.g. **freien** for **freuen, eire** for **cure, Freind** for **Freund.**
5. The long **a** of Standard German is replaced by the low rounded back vowel (written **aa** in the traditional popular orthography), e.g **Daag** for **Tag, aantschtaan** for **angetan, Schaaren** for **Scharen.**
6. The stop consonants are pronounced as voiceless unaspirated lenes, just as in the dialect, e.g. **Grischdus** for **Christus, Gleider** for **Kleider, Lamben** for **Lampen, bereidet** for **bereitet, Schweschder** for **Schwester.**
7. As in the dialect, the **s** is voiceless in all positions.
8. The combination **st** is pronounced **schd** in all positions, e.g. **Grischdus** for **Christus** and **finschdre** for **finstere.**

It should be pointed out, in closing, that scholars have paid too little attention to the interrelationship of Standard High German and the Pennsylvania German dialect. To get a better picture of the linguistic and cultural development of Eastern Pennsylvania more studies must be made of the "Dutchified" German used in the past and present by Pennsylvania Germans in various sections of the dialect area.

---

* Presented as a paper at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, Saturday, December 29, 1945.

(1) It is so used as early as 1829 in Ernst Braun's **Mittheilungen aus Nordamerika, die hoehern Lehranstalten und die Englisirung der dortigen Deutschen betreffend** (Braunschweig, 1829).

(2) This Pennsylvania German influence on the English as spoken by the Pennsylvania Germans has been treated in a number of articles. Cf. J. W. Frey, "The English of the Pennsylvania Germans in Eastern York County," **'S Pennsylfawnisch Deitsch Eck**, May 18, 1940; E. R. Page, "English in the Pennsylvania German Area," **American Speech, XII** (1937), 203-6; G. G. Struble, "The English of the Pennsylvania Germans," **American Speech, X** (1935), 163-72; R. W. Tucker, "Linguistic Substrata in Pennsylvania and Elsewhere," **Language, X** (1934), 1-5; Clyde S. Stine, **Problems of Education Among the Pennsylvania Germans**, unpublished Cornell Ph.D. Thesis, 1938.

(3) I record the hymns in the traditional popular orthography used by Dr. Barba in the **Eck** and by Dr. J. William Frey in his **Pennsylvania Dutch Grammar** (Clinton, S. C., 1942). Speakers of Pennsylvania German who are regular readers of the **Eck** will know how to read this spelling. They will know, for example, that even though in the traditional orthography an r is still written in such words as **Haer, waerd,** and **dart**, no r-sound is pronounced. Since most of the readers of the **Eck** are not scientifically trained linguists, it has not been considered expedient to use the phoentic symbols of the International Phonetic Association. Linguists who are not native speakers of the dialect (but who might be interested in reading the hymns) should first refer to Frey's **Pennsylvania Dutch Grammar**, pp. 1-9. For a bibliography of general and detailed discussions of the phonetic structure of the Pennsylvania German dialect, cf. Otto Springer, "The Study of the Pennsylvania German Dialect," **Journal of English and Germanic Philology**, 42:31-39 (January, 1943).

(4) Cf. Heinrich Fischer, **Die Geistliche Viole** (New Berlin, Pa., 1850), pp. 73, 74, 126, 156, 172.

(5) A study of old grammars and spelling books has shown that a Pennsylvania High German pronunciation was actually taught.

(6) Written **waerd, Haer, faerdich, haerrlich** and **dart** in the traditional popular orthography.